

English Instruction and Learning in Japan: then and now

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Introductory

This paper discusses how the learning of English in Japan, or maybe the English learned by students in Japan, has appeared to the writer in the last quarter of a century. It will be suggested that not much has changed during this time and a number of reasons why this may be so will be suggested. I base the discussion on observations and experiences related to English use by students of English in Japan, and try to draw out from these what can be surmised about the reasons for the situations described. The selection of the situations and other matters taken up is idiosyncratic and entirely the responsibility of the writer, but they are occurrences that have been experienced by the writer. The opinions developed from these situations have been reached through much reading and thinking about the background to what happened (as reported here) however, and they relate especially to situations where there are communication breakdowns and other dissonance in the language classrooms and other language controlled environments I am acquainted with.

I have been teaching at an established college for most of the period covered, and much of my experience and the opinions I have formed are colored by experiences in formal settings where the students are recent high school graduates. I have however also taught classes for the general population during these years and have had the opportunity to talk to many long time learners of, mainly, English. In my professional activities (as a member of JALT [Japan Association for Language Teaching]) I have taken part in a so called “Peer Support Group” that helps budding writers to write up their language research by helping to get the papers (drafts?) they generate under control and into a publishable format. The papers we work with in the peer group are often very raw, before convention has been imposed and softening of edges has taken place. Papers by non-native English speakers initially display many of the shortcomings I discuss below. I have also published on less general aspects of teaching and language learning environments, the classroom environment, large classes, and computer assisted learning, among other topics. Having given oral presentations in these areas, I have had occasion to reflect my opinions in the feedback I have been subjected to through these activities.

My inability to distinguish much change over the years can be put down to a number of reasons. One would be that having become inured to what is going on around me I have

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stopped to notice what is changing but that things are changing, despite what I posit here. I would counter this with the experience I have with written texts, where it can be shown objectively that errors in writing remain as they always were. For other kinds of output it would be less easy to provide solid evidence, however the matters I am taking up in the following have been puzzling me for ever so many years, but all are based on occurrences happening within the last year or so.

By way of example, one matter of this kind is the spelling mistakes and semantic dissonance that are a source of much mirth (engrish.com is dedicated to such mistakes). The persistence of these mistakes could suggest that the authors of these irregular spellings and other unusual English are still solely focused on the word level (the mis-spelled, -applied word) and an approximate “katakana” colored enunciation, and not on the meaning that the surrounding longer stretch of text is meant to convey. Such an analysis would fit nicely into what will be discussed below as well as the reason mentioned above, and they (the misspellings) have certainly been around for as long as I have.

There is an element of *déjà vu* in the reasoning here (recalling the past when meeting with what appears as recurrences in the present) and all may not be as bleak as I make it appear in the following. One is generally pulled up by the things that do not go well and need adjustments, or when apparently strange, unexpected, reactions are not being rectified, not being looked at critically, and when they seem to persist and persist and persist. Whatever qualifications are suggested, the observations reported here were made, and hold some measure of truth and have validity.

I use the term “Japan” throughout, and to claim to talk about “Japan” without further qualification would seem as preposterous to others as it does to me. It may also be that in Japan areas other than Hokkaido (where I have worked) have had a happier history with learning English. However, I have chosen to use the all-inclusive “Japan” for convenience and as everybody else uses it like this. A further matter that impinges on the issues here but is generally (and also largely here) ignored in discussions is the various perceptions of Japanese and non-Japanese of each other. These matters are often used to explain away obvious dissonance, but will not be discussed in any further detail.

Further, the paper will talk about learning English, English language teaching, foreign and/or second language teaching/learning, and there will be other permutations of these terms. I am using these interchangeably and do not attempt to distinguish them in any other way than the context may suggest. In most cases this is an overgeneralization, but the disagreements in the field of study considered here for how to delineate the various terms will be used as an excuse to avoid a more rigorous delineation.

The bases for the discussion

The opinions and discussion presented here are entirely the responsibility of the writer, and while few of the positions need be seen as set in stone (to me), one always hopes for the

better, the evidence seems to point in the direction that will be described. The paper will be focused around a number of phenomena that I have observed and try to learn from these what could be the background to the phenomena, what brought them about, and what their effect could be on language learning in general.

To provide a summary, before the evidence is presented, much of the blame for the poor results: the lack of change in English competence, the paucity of improvements in the quality of the English learned, that I feel is the case in Japan, can be placed at the door of the teaching that students are subject to: the practices of the practitioners (educators) in the learning environment of this particular field of human endeavor. There are other issues too, especially the unquestioning acceptance of authority displayed by students in relation to their instructors. Added up, this has the effect to promote and reinforce the teaching that appears to pose obstacles to a more useful and efficient language learning, and of course also to improvements in the methods of instruction.

A matter that frequently rears its head is the position of grammar and translation (sequentially putting English words into Japanese or visa versa as practiced in language learning classrooms). It is still today possible to have a course of study based on texts that have been broken up into single sentences, numbered and printed on separate lines, with the activities in the classroom focused on putting these into Japanese. This is done without paying attention to the interconnectedness of these sentences or the situation that brought them together as a text in the first place, or any sense of any “unnaturalness” of the exercise. The sentences are rephrased in isolation, with the attendant confusion over words and phrases that in the complete text serves to connect and integrate the sentences into a text. Such activities not only violate good practices related to the handling of continuous text but provide students with a chopped up discontinuous language model that is not conducive to anything in particular. Further, the approved Japanese product (what is accepted and termed as the translation) in such cases is also not Japanese as it is practiced outside the language classroom. Rather, it is a word for word rephrasing, making sure that every word in one language has been given a translated counterpart in the other, and so violates most rules of written or spoken Japanese and/or English discourse.

Grammar and translation will not be specifically discussed below, however the reasons for much of what is taken up in the following can be traced to classroom study of the kind explained in the previous paragraph. Study that is very detailed and formulaic and not directly related to language production as that is known outside the classroom.

The discussion in the following has been grouped around specific observations, trying to understand why the situation is the way it is and what obstacles can be expected to result from the deficiencies of the particular linguistic behavior. First, a number of observations that cast light on how progress in language competence is affected, or hindered rather. Then looking at how new material is incorporated into the already learned corpus of acquired second language, this is followed by examples of how students are conditioned to act in language learning environments, before, finally, a look at the uses of culture in the second

language classroom.

Getting on with the study

This section contains reflections on half a dozen observations to help understand how I see the shortcomings in English language learning and their roots in the instruction students are subjected to. These include a lack of attention to the processes that result in language acquisition, the presence of over-learned fossilized phrases that block acquisition of new material, shortcomings in the attention paid to important aspects of what is going on in the language classroom, an ingrown lack of interest (resistance to fresh ideas and input) in going beyond the material at hand, and contradictorily, high expectations for success in the next step of the study, to be achieved by a repetition (review) of what has been studied so far.

Study skills

It used to be that I would ask students how they study English, I don't do that any more, I get on with the study as I think it should be pursued, and along the way pull up and we think about what it is we are doing.

I stopped asking because I thought the responses I received were uninformative. It seems that students do what they are told to do and they themselves do not much think about what an activity leads to, the hope may be a better English competence but even that does not seem to be a concern much of the time. It appears that the focus for students is to do what they have been told to do. Then if it all gets too uninteresting or painful, students will readily and uncomplainingly drop out of the study and go look for a new teaching situation.

When the goal of the study is academic credits, at the end building up to graduation, students display a very marked ability (willingness?) to put up with nearly anything offered. There also seems to be set expectations for what a study involves, and if these expectations are not fulfilled the study is considered to be of poor utility. However, when asked to explain why study should be conducted in some expected manner, then, as per the start of the section, there is very little apparent reflection or awareness of own needs. Other than: Well, that was how it was in the previous study, how/what we were asked to do/study.

One example is the use of dictionaries, apparently looking up a word involves having an English or Japanese word and then looking for an equivalent in the opposite language. When a candidate for a word looked up is spotted in the dictionary it is used quite uncritically. The dictionary has spoken and the student will conform to what it says, no amount of explanation or prodding will get your average student to go back and check that the choice is right, by looking up the other-language equivalent of the word (translation) chanced upon.

From the above, it would appear that, for an average student, study comprises what an instructor instructs the students to do. That done, students are happy to take a break till new instructions are received and the "study" can proceed. It may be imagined that students have been strongly coerced into doing what they are told and discouraged from doing anything

else: Staunching inquisitiveness and curiosity about what else the world could offer.

Saying “You’re welcome” and “Attendance slip”

Many years ago saying “thank you” to a student, when giving something to the student, would elicit no set response or maybe a confused apology in Japanese. Then, along the way the phrase “you’re welcome” was introduced in high school English and everybody now knows it. When met with a thank you “you’re welcome” is a common riposte. In the department where I work I have asked the oral (conversation) teachers to try to also teach “please” as a response in this situation, but with no apparent effect. When students are told about the magic of “please” in this situation they listen politely, and while it does seem to register it does not seem to sink in that using “please” in response to “thank you” is also an option.

Thinking about reasons for this apparent poor ability to latch onto a new phrase by simple exposure without having it backed up by the authority of a lesson and an extensive explanation could arise as the already learned has been over-learned and internalized to an extent that it cannot be dislodged and is hampering a broadening of usage knowledge. This over-learning and fossilization likely caused by tests or study in anticipation of tests.

This argument is to some extent supported by the situation where students are asked to request an “attendance slip.” In my classes this happens to latecomers who need to mouth this phrase with a “please” or similar appended to get the “attendance card” as the Japanese name could be, word-for-word translated. Students have trouble learning to say “attendance slip,” and they do not succumb to checking their dictionaries, or think it through and learn it to make the term stick. The students seem to think this to be one of the hoops of my classes (which it is), but else unrelated to English, and they are not concerned about incorporating it into their store of useful phrases. What’s wrong with “attendance card” they seem to think. To get around this hurdle, the apparent student inability to learn the English phrase, rather than compromising by accepting apologies or the Japanese term, I write the phrase (“attendance slip”) on the blackboard in every lesson, and that generally solves the problem for my lessons. Still, the ability to say “attendance slip please” or similar (without squinting at the blackboard) is not always mastered in the two years I meet the students.

Native Japanese language teachers dismissively support this lack of interest in attending to an elucidation and internalization of the phrase. Likely it is not among the required phrases for study and so considered outside the Pale, not needing attention, or possibly it is unknown to JTEs (Japanese teachers of English). There would be similar cases of a reluctance to incorporate learning of what has not been drilled for a test, and contentedly keep making do with a rephrasing of the Japanese rather than trying to learn an English phrase proffered. Picking up language through interaction with others appears to be frowned upon, the English used has to be taught in class, and so be part of the officially sanctioned “English,” used only as it was drilled there, the students seem to say, and vicarious learning is disregarded and so impeded.

Not paying attention to instructions

Poor student attention when instructions are given manifests itself both in and outside the classroom. In the classroom instructions are generally ignored (students do not listen to or act on the new), leading to frequent failure at new tasks. When such failures occur, it is somehow felt that the giver of the instructions is at fault. Often, rather than trying to pay attention to instructions, spoken or written, attempts at comprehension are left for later discussions with peers, who are used as arbiters of what was said.

Outside the classroom students pay very limited attention to trying to imagine what goes on in a situation (played out in a foreign language) they may find themselves in. It seems to be assumed that when a message is not in the native tongue and could appear incomprehensible, immediate attention to and concentration on the matter explained is irrelevant. There will be a “responsible” person (maybe a fellow student) to be trusted to know what is to be done, even when there is none directly available. Paying attention to instructions, and taking responsibility for understanding them, does not seem to be in the cards.

A source of this may be that students are exposed to much formulaic learning in their language instruction, where procedures are repeated again and again. Responses to tests that deviate ever so slightly from what students are used to will have a proportion of students who respond without apparently worrying about the dissonance caused by impossible or incomprehensible responses. Likely, the enforcing of specific procedures in specific situations, and blaming the students when they deviate ever so little from the norm, and show creative individuality, has instilled a passive attitude to what goes on. This, in turn, discourages self-initiated attempts to grasp situations.

The overlong explanations

An alternative reading of the reasons suggested in the previous section could be that during the study of languages (English as a foreign or second language certainly) students have been subjected to very long and very detailed explanations of practically any aspect of the language studied and that they suffer from input fatigue. It may also be asked why explanations have to be so long. Listening in on English classes one is often treated to very long monologues from the instructor, detailedly explaining every little point that may be isolated. Much of this explanation is irrelevant to the study at hand, and as students do not question the rights of an instructor to do anything at all in the classroom, the result could be a lack of attention when the teacher speaks, but maybe also a lack of interest, letting the sleeping dog (the unchallenged teacher) lie as it may be. The message that students may get when explanations go on and on could be that they are at liberty to tune out during this part of lessons and that just pretending to pay attention will do nicely. In the world outside the classroom such an attitude and behavior does not foster a better understanding of the world of course.

Not trying to catch on to the not yet known

There are times however when, contrary to the observations above, students are aware of matters that they could/should know to make the material/situation at hand more meaningful. Here the very pronounced lack of interest in fleshing out the already known that students display, may be postulated to be caused by a realization that there will likely not be any questions about this on the test, or maybe that the parts left without detailed explanations are meant to be left that way, and that this is accepted by the “environment.” When challenged to go look up something that a student has expressed ignorance of, the writer has frequently met with a response along the lines of “is it really necessary to take matters this serious?” and similar. Here, students seem to say that class work is all very well but it is not real enough to deal with seriously, so why overdo it and get engaged in what is only a make believe activity (the classroom English instruction) anyway? Such an attitude may be helpful to negotiate the shoals of the foreign language classroom, but when challenged to master an area of expertise (here second language competence) it is pure poison.

The need for a teacher

The oft expressed need to be under the tutelage of a good teacher is also one of the unchanging aspects of language learning. When potential students are steeling themselves for yet another bout of study they often express the need for finding an excellent teacher who will teach the language (English) from the basics. Students entering college seem to expect that, and older adults of all ages more or less express similar sentiments when embarking on language study anew. The perennial dissatisfaction with the level of competence achieved does not lead to any apparent wish for a drastic break with the practices of the past. When students express disapproval of an instructor it is often framed in terms of the teaching being different from what they may have expected or been subjected to in previous study.

Exploring causes for this attitude, it could be that having learned to do only what one has been told to do, anything new really will turn into a chore, except maybe in exceptional circumstances. This, coupled with a passive attitude to “pushing the envelope” would become an obstacle to further language acquisition.

Summing up this section

The examples above seem to point to the classroom as the source of the poor habits that students display in their use of English. It may be suggested that the activities there are not conducive to language learning, and that the intensity and seriousness that classroom language learning is treated with, blocks avenues for growth in linguistic ability outside this environment. This need of course not be the case, however, instructors are very strongly wedded to their beliefs of what constitutes language instruction (see Scott Thornbury: Communities of practice; How teachers construe their teaching. in *The Language Teacher* Vol.2 No.7, 2008, pp.35-37), and tend to reinforce an attitude of dependence in students.

With polite students there is no pressure for the instructor to change the ways of the

classroom, and so, there is no looking into reasons for the deficiencies in the output. The poor language and language learning habits of the students in the classes do not become issues of interest. It also makes it possible for instructors to “wash their hands” of anything that students may do there.

Incorporating the new

This section will take up some observations of how students react when asked to deal with something new, of course related to learning a foreign language. There is some overlap with the following and it may also be seen as a substantiation of the issues raised above. The specific matters are student reactions when “suddenly” having to cope with demands for performance of something that has not been specifically studied (writing cursively), when having time to think about something new (writing one’s home address on an envelope), and responding to a query regarding the learning of something not taught in school (how a commonly encountered kanji phrase that is not part of the school learning was actually learned).

“I don’t know how to write cursively.”

When taking the TOEFL test students are required to copy a short statement in cursive writing and put their signature under this copied statement. Many claim not to be able to do this, because, as they claim, “we have not learned how to write cursively.” Adults who are well out of school will say it, younger students too.

The reasons for this reaction puzzled me quite a while, and the only explanation for why students can consider the claim they make as a valid one, seems to be that cursive writing has not been drilled during class. The instructions for the test clearly state that this (copying a statement in cursive writing) has to be done, and every candidate for a TOEFL test will claim to have read the instructions and to know them well enough to follow the instructions to the letter, to sit for the test.

The single explanation for this perennial hiccup at tests I can come up with is that students do not consider any of what they could do by themselves as students of English to have much meaning (certainly) at official occasions. Then when sitting for the TOEFL test, and a non-negotiable demand is presented they do not quite dare to just muddle through. That such notions have not been countered during the very many hours of instruction students have been subjected to is a serious shortcoming of English study as it is delivered at present.

Putting one’s home address into English

A similar issue arises when having to write the home address on an envelope or application form in English. This has rarely been studied in class and there does not appear to be any paradigm for how addresses are handled when not written in Japanese (and in Kanji characters), the post office does provide guidelines, though, but these are not known or

consulted. Asking students to imagine that they are the mailman, and thinking about how they (as mail deliverers) would like an address written rarely gets beyond wanting to write it in Japanese. One impression I am left with, related to this, is that students are afraid of doing it in a “wrong” way, and that inactivity is preferable and considered safer than “just doing something.” It may be asked if abandoning even to think about writing the address (or something else that is new) is a learned response that has met with success in the classroom, with its ever explaining instructor.

As with the cursive writing above, the solution, to ask around when there is time for that or to jump in and act when that is the only option left, usually solves the problem. Still, the apparently poor skills at coping, when given leeway to think, or when there is no escape, lead to much wasted worrying and heartache.

Matters not acquired through school learning

Conversely, thinking about Japanese, beyond distinguishing the “correct” and acceptable from what is not, I have had occasion to ask how the kanji term 鍼灸 (*hari-kyu*, acupuncture) was learned. This term is frequently seen in billboards around town, it is not included among the official kanji, and has not been learned formally. Everybody knows it though, but no one I have asked seem to know or wish to speculate about how they have learned it, and often just the asking of the question is considered suspect, why could such a question arise? My informants seem to think. The reactions I have encountered here appear to relate to an attitude that, what is not taught it is not necessary to bother with thinking about, and it can and should be ignored. If it is indeed such an attitude and if that is commonly applied to the learning of English it will seriously curtail and impede what may be called “street learning,” a very important element of osmotic language acquisition.

How learning of the new is impeded

As above there are quite a number of occasions where students display a marked unwillingness to respond to a new situation with a “can do” attitude. To the writer, this passivity seems extreme and counterproductive. It is possible that it has been learned, by students being put down (sat upon or otherwise discouraged) in individual attempts at overcoming obstacles during the formal study of English, and thus have learned to eschew experimentation, to do nothing but the carefully drilled, the very safe.

Applying learned skills

There are also situations where an observer is allowed a peep into what the learned language (English) is used for, how it is put to use by the authorized practitioners in the classrooms.

One such situation is the study abroad that is paid for by taxpayers and where instructors go abroad for a period of time to learn about language teaching, to do research in an

environment where English is spoken. The effect of this practice, as I have observed it, is that in many ways it “fossilizes” and strengthens the insistence on structure and certainty in language instruction. Then with the pedigree of having gone on such a course an instructor is unquestioningly deferred to after returning, maybe causing some inflation of self-respect, and/or fear of making obvious mistakes. There is little effort invested in using the newly acquired skills in the language, be that in classroom instruction or in interactions with fellow instructors.

To get around these poor results, the national bureaucracy ruling the teaching profession has then created a further layer of language instruction practitioners through the JET program (the Japan Exchange and Teaching programme [sic.]). Here English speakers with no particular experience in teaching or language learning get to take part in classes as assistants to the regular instructors.

This is not the place to evaluate the JET program, but I would be amiss not to mention that meaningful activities accrue from the program. We are beginning to see reports describing attempts that JETs (ETAs [English Teaching Assistants]) make to soften the impact of the teaching. One recent report detailed how an ETA managed to get JTEs (like above, Japanese teachers of English - the JET program is a goldmine of alphabet soup) to speak to their students in English and the positive outcomes of that (see David Heywood: Motivation and the awareness of JTEs as L2 users. In *The Language Teacher* Vol.32 No.10, 2008, pp.9-10).

It has also happened that I have been invited to give lectures at high schools and then when bringing materials and using these the most confused person in the room is generally the JTE, not sure of what one is allowed to look at and how to go about doing activities that are not part of the daily fare. This reaction seems an indication that the daily fare comprises an ever careful chewing over of everything and relying on the known, not inviting variation and change.

At the college where I work, there have also been students who on their own suddenly realize that nothing beyond “English” is learned in English instruction and so any study of subject matter starts from zero, with the learned English on board of course. One sign of this is the intellectual aridity of the material taken up in lessons, which is a sad reflection on what instructors feel confident in including in the study. Tangentially related to this there is a recent article (English Story Cycle: The basis of an elementary school English curriculum by Rausch in *The Language Teacher*, Vol.32 No.11, 2008, p.12) that reports “interest scores” of English Second Language and “real” - unadapted to language study - stories where the real stories score twice the ESL stories on the scale used there. That paper is not evaluating the perceived quality of the materials, and the poor scores for the ESL texts are not particularly discussed.

A final matter, which perhaps relates more to the culture of the field that instruction in foreign languages comes under, applied linguistics. There is very little work addressing and resolving the most strongly held beliefs of the field (grammar, translation, entrenched

procedures, and similar), and where such research exists it is forgotten and ignored. An outstanding example here is the finding many years ago by Tom Robb of Kyoto Sangyo University, that correcting of compositions (covering them lightly or heavily in red marks) has no effect on improved writing ability in the second language. The only factor that was shown to improve the accuracy of writing was the volume written by a student. This finding is now not known or knowledge of its existence is denied. So, even today, teachers state that the teaching of composition is difficult because the teacher has to spend unending hours correcting the large volumes of written exercises generated by a class of 30 or 40 students.

This section has tried to show that instructors are an obstacle to flexible, useful language learning and that practically anything they do will be made to fit into the mold that they claim English is. This is not a good omen for what can be achieved in language classrooms, again when considering the over learning of a limited volume of material that is the reality in secondary schools and the insistence on adhering to form.

Culture

Cultural differences, Japan vs. the World, are often used to explain away deficiencies in English language education. Many commentators claim that special Japanese character (or culture) traits are at the root of this. It is not surprising that such discussion receives attention considering the very real deficiencies that most second language learners feel in their progress in learning a second language. It may sound flippant to state that these concerns are on a par with the perceived personality differences caused by differences in blood type that have been thoroughly debunked but are still considered valid in Japan, however. Still, from a positivist point of view, appearing to minimize such differences (as they relate to language learning), however strongly believed in, would seem to be the office of concerned instructors, as it would offer solace to students who may else be discouraged from tackling the study of a second language.

I have previously (in *The Language Teacher*, around 2004) published a report with comments of a visit to a junior high school classroom where I invited readers to contact me to learn how well I represented the case in other schools situations. I heard from a number of people, but from none by name (e-mail preserved anonymity). All agreed with my analysis (I claimed that very little language instruction/learning went on the class I inspected. I suggested that this focus on “busy-work” to the exclusion of language instruction/learning could be generalized to the whole of the nation) but went on to state that the Japanese teachers (JTEs) were doing their best and so it was not pertinent to even bring up these matters.

In my teaching of a content course (Geography) I have tried to get students to make oral presentations of the reports that are part of the course. I have rarely been successful in getting competent presentations, and the most telling reason I have heard from students is that “because we are Japanese” oral presentations are difficult and should be avoided. Here

the willingness to use culture (geographical origins) as an excuse sounds like an easy way out, maybe a belief in what was stated two paragraphs up. It is certainly not an attitude that will be helpful in our modern world with less and less stress on routine work.

Summary

The above has attempted to show a number of shortcomings in the language skills acquired in foreign (second) languages by Japanese school leavers, and tried to think about the reasons why these shortcomings arise.

It was stated that paying attention to the classroom environment and the convenience of tenured language instructors, with perceived absolute authority over the dispensation of language skills can explain most of the matters that stand out as deficiencies.

It would be possible to speculate on what measures need to be taken to improve on this situation, but that will be considered outside the orbit of this paper.

Instead a more ideal language learning environment will be outlined next. In an ideal language learning environment the person overseeing the goings on in the classroom would be available for consultation with each individual student, while other students are busy performing tasks that they have been assigned, or have chosen to do, and which are of a variety and require a level of competence that suits each student. When consulted the instructor would not consider student contributions against any absolute standard, but attempt to make sense of the proffered and provide advice that is accepting of different interpretations.

This could be the goal, but the process of putting the various elements into place would require time and effort. However, without any effort invested in this, and clinging to the ways that have failed learners for years immemorial, nothing much will change, in effect maintaining the situation that has existed, and has been agreed on as unsatisfactory, certainly for as long as the writer has been around.

With the internet and ubiquitous computer access the ideal language learning environment suggested in the previous paragraph could be created without inconveniencing anything but the entrenched ways of instruction and the purveyors of these entrenched ways.

A final anecdote may be in place. Not so very many years ago, a team of local teachers investigated differences and similarities in English teaching in Japan and Finland. The results discussed the vocabulary and structure of the English used in the texts in Japan and Finland. There were no noteworthy differences in the texts, and when comparing the vocabularies students had to master, it was found that they also closely matched. The only difference isolated was that in the Japanese textbooks the words “Japan” and “Japanese” were used. These two words and their Finnish counterparts were not present in the texts used in Finland.

Much may be read into this, but I will leave that to the reader who has followed me so far.

[Abstract]

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This paper describes perceived shortcomings in English teaching in Japanese schools. It uses a number of examples of “natural” English as used by students of English where skills appear lacking and speculates about what the reasons for the deficiencies can be. It suggests that the rigid, unimaginative ways pushed through in English instruction is at the root of the problems perceived by the writer, and that this impedes a smooth progress in the English competence of students of English.

[要約]

日本での英語教育と学習
昔と今

トーキル クリステンセン

この論文は書者が指適する日本での英語教育の欠点を論ずるものです。論文はいくつかの実例、英語学習者の取得した英語、をもとにその欠点を説明し、そしてこの問題点の原因を探ってます。論文の結論では、日本での英語教育の妨げになったことは頑固に想像力の欠けた教育展開です。